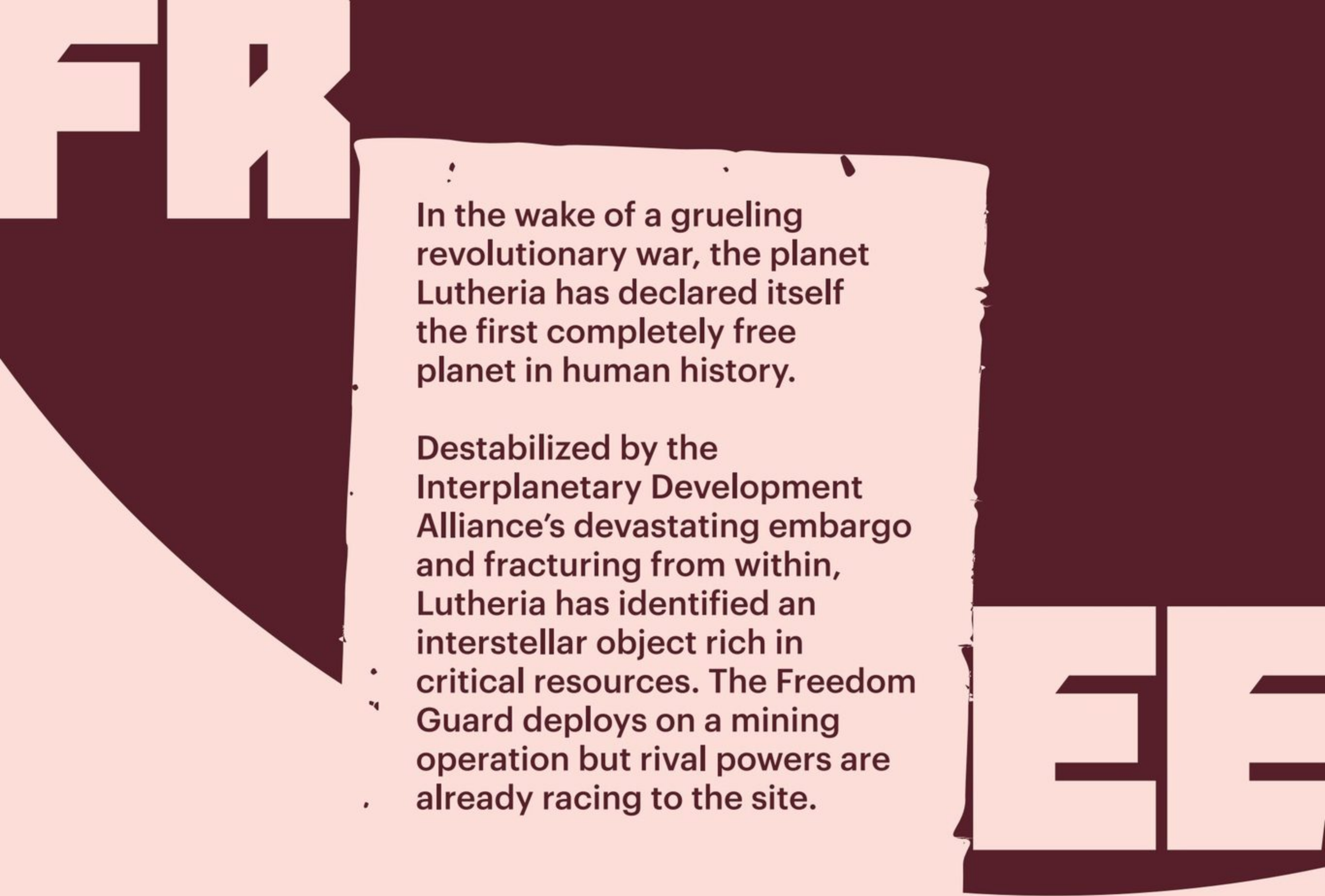




SITTERSON
DOUGHERTY
ASTONE
ESPOSITO

FREE PLANET NET





In the wake of a grueling revolutionary war, the planet Lutheria has declared itself the first completely free planet in human history.

Destabilized by the Interplanetary Development Alliance’s devastating embargo and fracturing from within, Lutheria has identified an interstellar object rich in critical resources. The Freedom Guard deploys on a mining operation but rival powers are already racing to the site.

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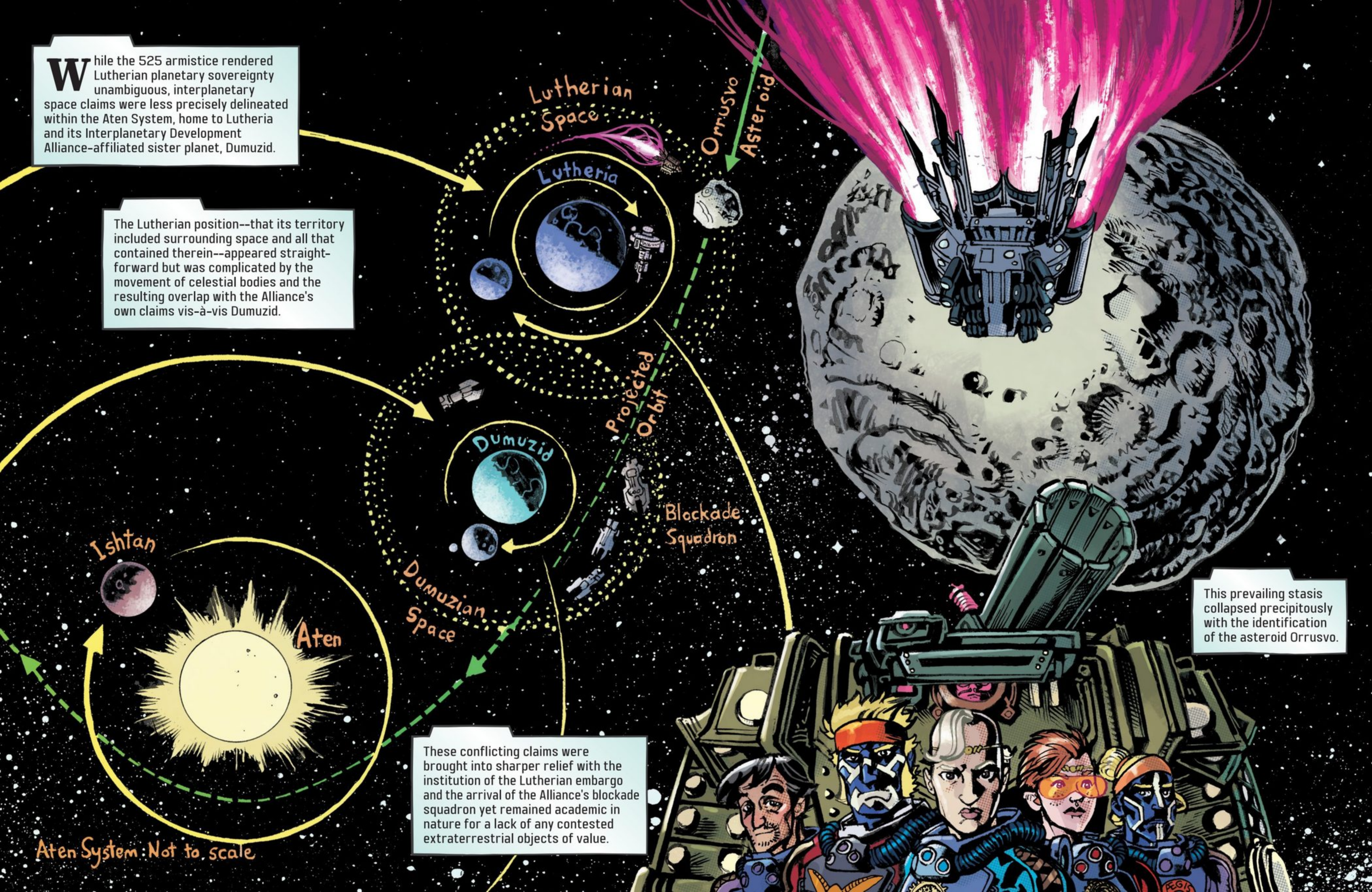
While the 525 armistice rendered Lutheran planetary sovereignty unambiguous, interplanetary space claims were less precisely delineated within the Aten System, home to Lutheria and its Interplanetary Development Alliance-affiliated sister planet, Dumuzid.

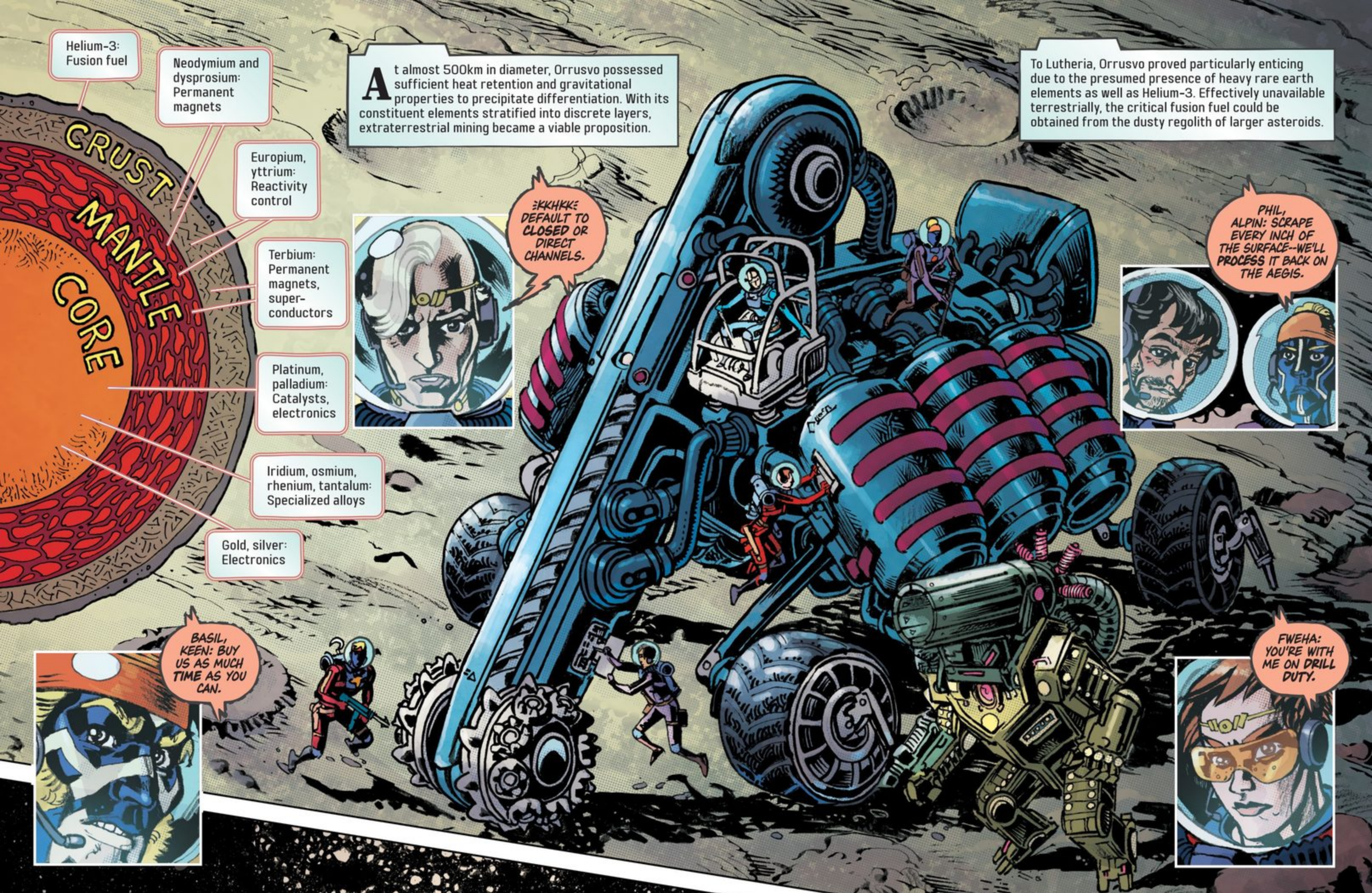
The Lutheran position--that its territory included surrounding space and all that contained therein--appeared straightforward but was complicated by the movement of celestial bodies and the resulting overlap with the Alliance's own claims vis-à-vis Dumuzid.

Aten System: Not to scale

These conflicting claims were brought into sharper relief with the institution of the Lutheran embargo and the arrival of the Alliance's blockade squadron yet remained academic in nature for a lack of any contested extraterrestrial objects of value.

This prevailing stasis collapsed precipitously with the identification of the asteroid Orrusvo.





Helium-3:
Fusion fuel

Neodymium and
dysprosium:
Permanent
magnets

Europium,
yttrium:
Reactivity
control

Terbium:
Permanent
magnets,
super-
conductors

Platinum,
palladium:
Catalysts,
electronics

Iridium, osmium,
rhenium, tantalum:
Specialized alloys

Gold, silver:
Electronics

At almost 500km in diameter, Orrusvo possessed sufficient heat retention and gravitational properties to precipitate differentiation. With its constituent elements stratified into discrete layers, extraterrestrial mining became a viable proposition.

EEKKKKE
DEFAULT TO
CLOSED OR
DIRECT
CHANNELS.

To Lutheria, Orrusvo proved particularly enticing due to the presumed presence of heavy rare earth elements as well as Helium-3. Effectively unavailable terrestrially, the critical fusion fuel could be obtained from the dusty regolith of larger asteroids.

PHIL,
ALPIN: SCRAPE
EVERY INCH OF
THE SURFACE--WE'LL
PROCESS IT BACK ON
THE AEGIS.

BASIL,
KEEN: BUY
US AS MUCH
TIME AS YOU
CAN.

FWEHA:
YOU'RE WITH
ME ON DRILL
DUTY.

However, the very properties that drew Lutheria's attention also rendered Orrusvo appealing to Alliance commercial and military interests, with the additional strategic advantage of denying the embattled planet resources vital to its development.

With nearby Alliance military forces committed to embargo enforcement, exploration and extraction were undertaken by Jianault Minerals with security support from Meed Defense Services, both wholly owned subsidiaries of the larger Jianault Group.

SWITCHING
TO AN OPEN
CHANNEL.

EEKKKKE
YOU'VE ENTERED
LUTHERIAN
SOVEREIGN
TERRITORY.

FORCEFUL,
BASIL.

YOU HAVE
NO CLAIM
HERE. VACATE
IMMEDIATELY
BY ORDER OF
THE FREEDOM
GUARD.

EEKKKKE NEGATIVE.
JIANAULT MINERALS
IS DULY LICENSED
FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL
MINING IN THE ATEN
SYSTEM.

AND MEED
DEFENSE SERVICES
IS AUTHORIZED TO
SAFEGUARD IT.

On this we all agree: The Surroko love *freedom*.
We yearn, we fight, we have *died* for it.
But do we truly *win* it?
What good is freedom in poverty, in suffering, in *death*?

Our world has *changed*. Our lands and herds shrink
and thin.

We cannot fight what comes,
what is *already* here.

But a crucial freedom *yet* remains to us:
To choose safety and comfort.
To choose well for our *children*.

Chief Drest knows safety and comfort better than most.
Traded hills for plains, precarity for *security*,
Our mountains' *blood* for Alliance wealth.

But true Surroko don't just love freedom; we know it, *intimately*.
To *disobey*, to move, to forge a life of our choosing.
Our *ancestors* demand that freedom be guarded
With tooth and nail, kuttuk and *rifle*.

Surroko tribal moots were an annual occurrence, with disparate groups converging each winter upon monumental ceremonial centers, where the fierce tribalism of the warmer months was supplanted by communal feasting and often drastic societal reorganization.

Outside these seasonal aggregations, moots were held in response to crises affecting the Surroko across tribal boundaries, such as famine, drought, natural disaster, or—as in the spring of 519—mounting pressure from the Interplanetary Development Alliance.

As tribal moots were not recorded, their results being self-evident, the spring 519 moot merits particular note for an additional reason: its scrupulous documentation by Future Shock Energy anthropologist turned guerrilla revolutionary Victor MacLiu.

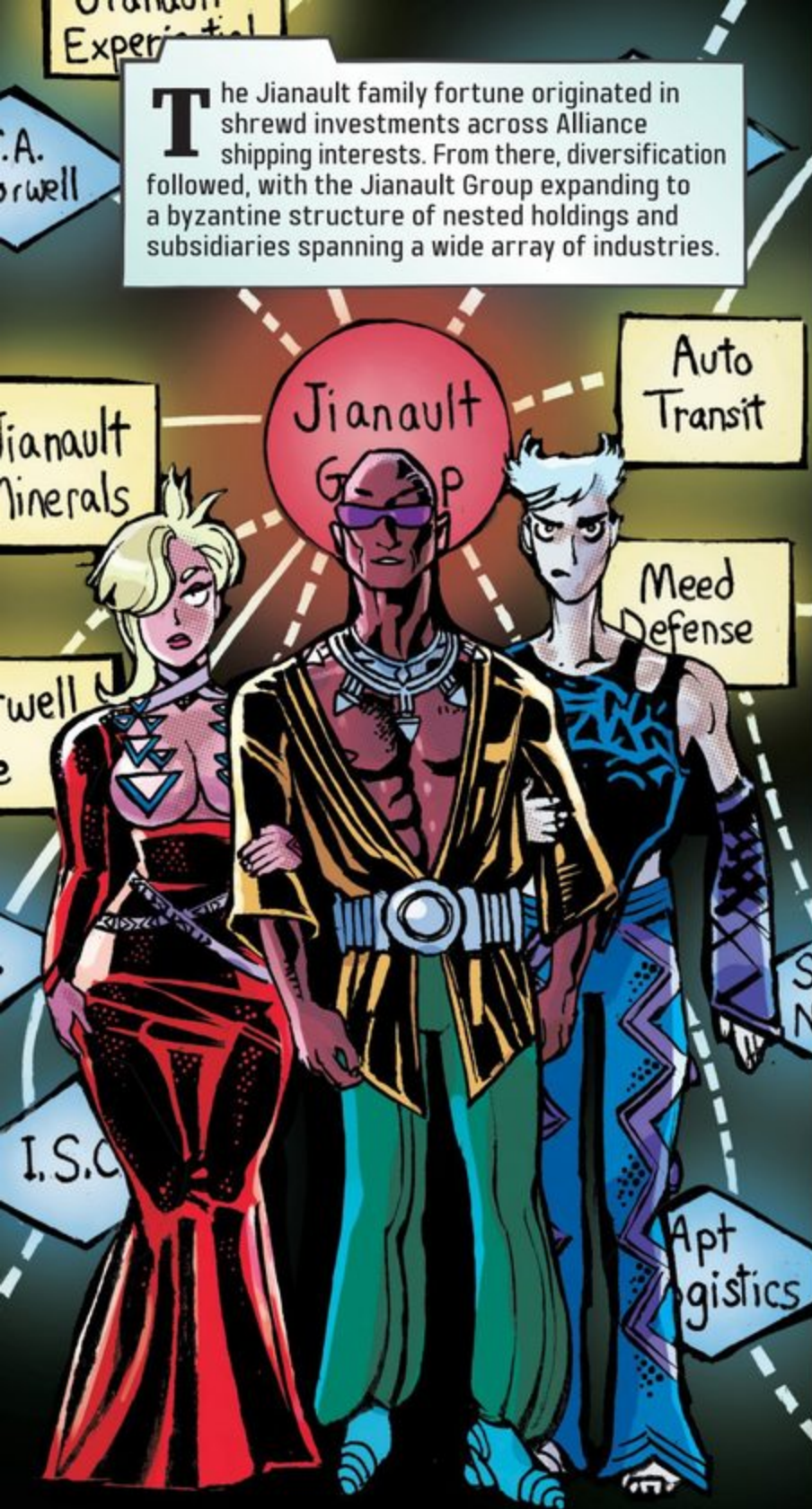
In keeping with precedent, myriad issues were broached and subjected to protracted deliberation throughout the ten-day moot. The most acrimonious debate, however, centered on an offer to sell the Surroko's collectively held land to the Universal Power Corporation.

EASY FOR
THE WAR
CHIEF TO
SAY!

I'VE
LOST TWO
CHILDREN TO
YOUR RAIDS!
TO YOUR
PRIDE!

I
WON'T LOSE
ANOTHER!

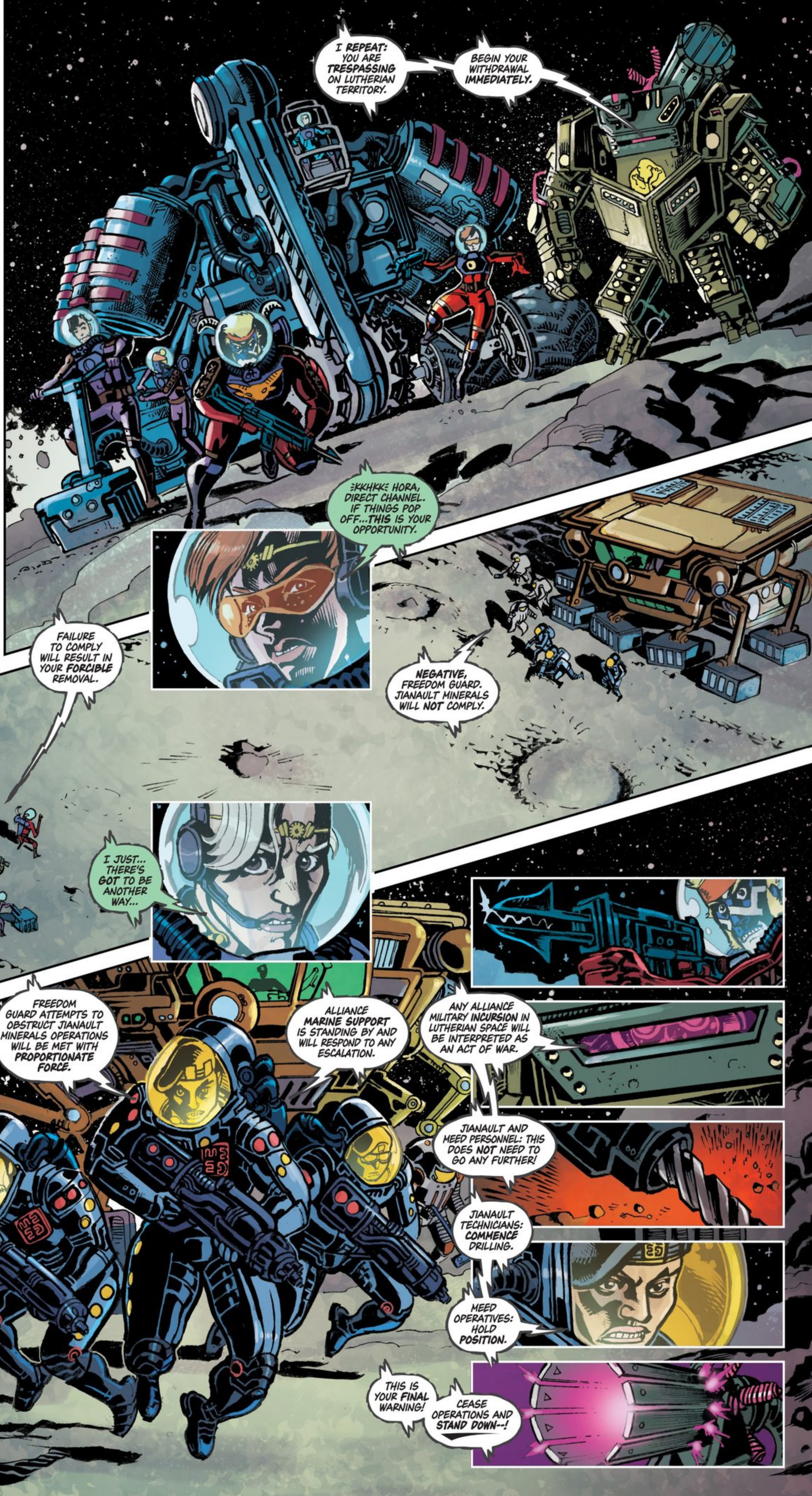




The Jianault family fortune originated in shrewd investments across Alliance shipping interests. From there, diversification followed, with the Jianault Group expanding to a byzantine structure of nested holdings and subsidiaries spanning a wide array of industries.

Jianault Minerals and Meed Defense Services were helped by the obstreperous Oskar Jianault, whose desire for autonomy drew his attentions away from the private Jianault family moon Meed and the charter worlds hosting the majority of their business.

Chasing his fortune in the Alliance hinterlands, Oskar Jianault's subsidiaries provided plausible deniability and bureaucratic remove for riskier endeavors of questionable legality, while still leveraging Jianault capital and Alliance military protection.



I REPEAT:
YOU ARE
TRESPASSING
ON LUTHERIAN
TERRITORY.

BEGIN YOUR
WITHDRAWAL
IMMEDIATELY.

EKKKKKE HORA,
DIRECT CHANNEL.
IF THINGS POP
OFF...THIS IS YOUR
OPPORTUNITY.

FAILURE
TO COMPLY
WILL RESULT IN
YOUR FORCIBLE
REMOVAL.

NEGATIVE,
FREEDOM GUARD.
JIANAULT MINERALS
WILL NOT COMPLY.

I JUST...
THERE'S
GOT TO BE
ANOTHER
WAY...

FREEDOM
GUARD ATTEMPTS TO
OBSTRUCT JIANAULT
MINERALS OPERATIONS
WILL BE MET WITH
PROPORTIONATE
FORCE.

ALLIANCE
MARINE SUPPORT
IS STANDING BY AND
WILL RESPOND TO ANY
ESCALATION.

ANY ALLIANCE
MILITARY INCURSION IN
LUTHERIAN SPACE WILL
BE INTERPRETED AS
AN ACT OF WAR.

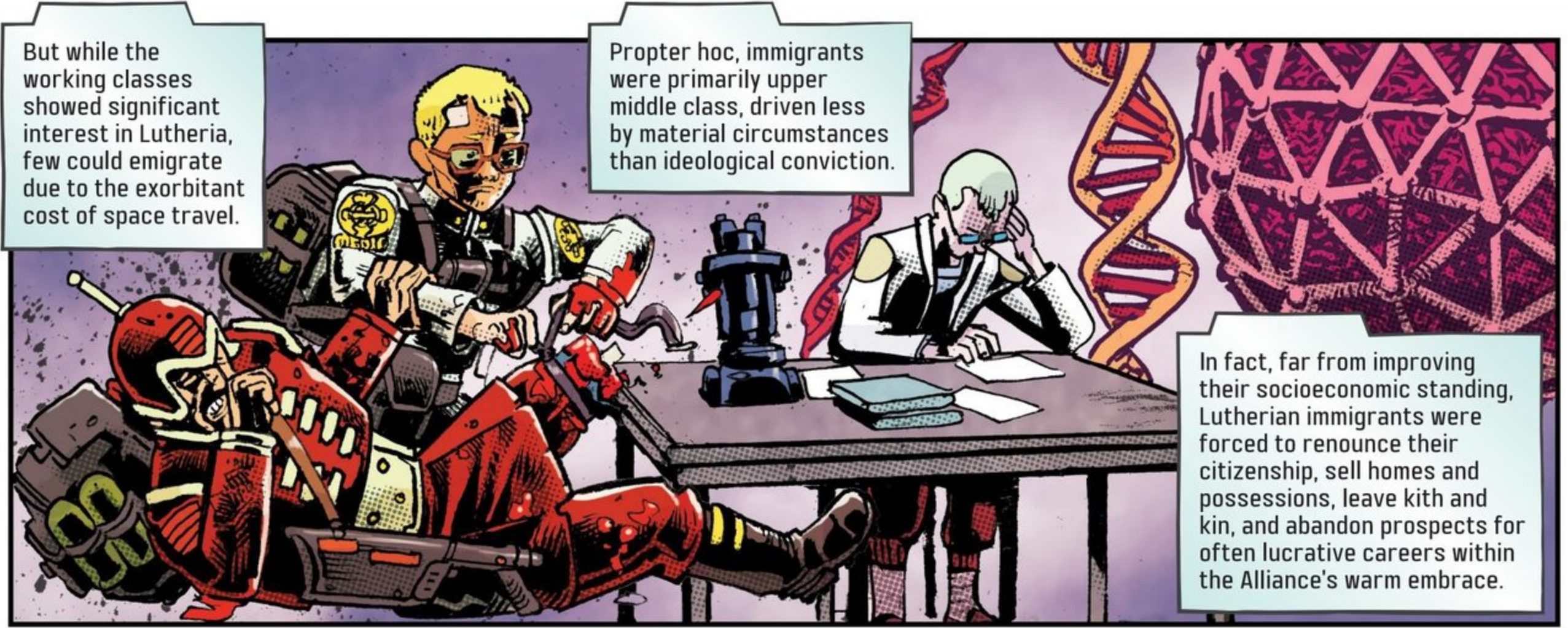
JIANAULT AND
MEED PERSONNEL: THIS
DOES NOT NEED TO
GO ANY FURTHER!

JIANAULT
TECHNICIANS:
COMMENCE
DRILLING.

MEED
OPERATIVES:
HOLD
POSITION.

THIS IS
YOUR FINAL
WARNING!

CEASE
OPERATIONS AND
STAND DOWN--!





ALL FOR THE
GLORY OF YOUR
FUTURE SHOCK
MASTERS.

BUT HERE'S
WHAT I WANT
TO KNOW:

ARE YOU
WILLING TO
DIE FOR
THEM?

THE
ANTHROPOLOGIST.
COME TO STUDY
US.

BUT I
KNOW WHY
YOU'RE REALLY
HERE. WHAT
YOU REALLY
ARE.

TO BE
OBSTRUCTIONIST.
TO MUDDY THE
WATERS.

TO MAKE
SURE THAT, IF
FUTURE SHOCK
CAN'T GET OUR
LAND, NO ONE
CAN.

UNTIL
THE PRETENSE
DROPS AND YOUR
DADDY'S FLEET
DESCENDS.

AND
KEEN?
HE'S NAIVE
ENOUGH TO
FALL FOR
IT.

FOOLISH
ENOUGH TO BELIEVE
THERE'S A WAY THINGS
CAN STAY THE SAME.
THAT THEY HAVEN'T
ALREADY CHANGED
FOREVER.

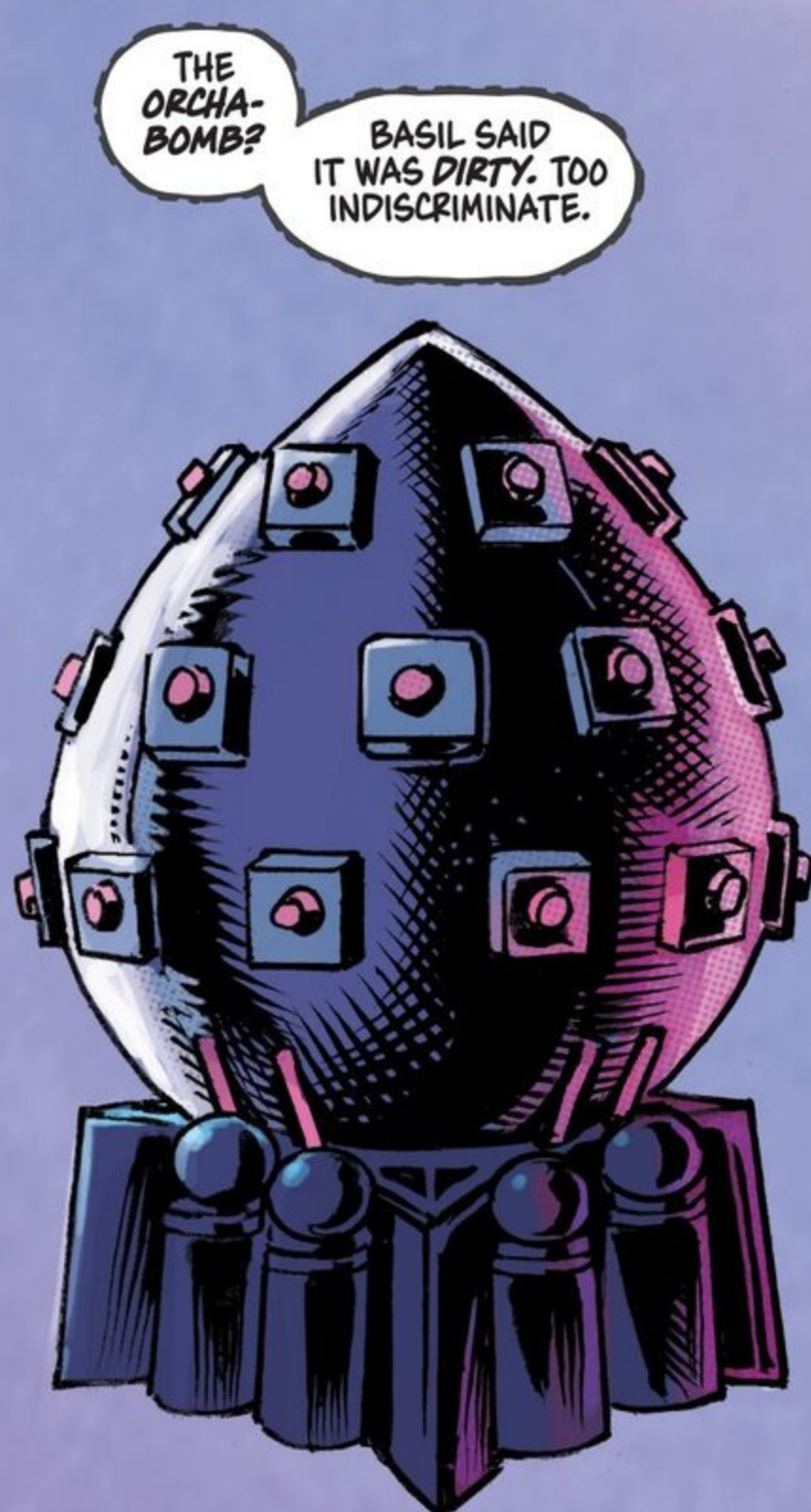
...I'LL MAKE
YOU MARTYRS
INSTEAD.

WILLING
TO SACRIFICE
SURROKO FREEDOM,
WEALTH AND LIVES
ON THE ALTAR OF HIS
ARROGANCE.

YOU TWO
WANT TO BE
HEROES...



Though post-Revolution Lutheria found itself in dire economic straits, its citizens driven to destitution and starvation by the Alliance's rigorously enforced embargo, military research and investment continued apace, the beneficiary of significant resources.





HORA, THIS IS YOUR BEST OPPORTUNITY. YOU HAVE TO DO IT NOW.



BASIL! SUPPRESSIVE FIRE!



PHIL! ALPIN! TAKE COVER!



NO. IT'S THE ONLY WAY.



The reasons behind the Orrusvo Incident's escalation into kinetic hostilities have remained a point of sustained debate, with those most ardently sympathetic to Lutheria attributing the entire conflict to saber-rattling overreach on the part of the Alliance.

While Luthieran sentiment generally upheld the legitimacy of the planet's claim to Orrusvo, opinion remained divided over Basil Usmansen's decision to initiate hostilities, with some of the hungry populace denouncing it as an act of reckless provocation.

Surpassing a mere border skirmish, the Orrusvo Incident threatened to grow into a protracted space campaign that, in contrast to the Revolution's guerrilla insurgency, demanded logistical and material resources that Lutheria was incapable of furnishing.

Moreover, the blockade squadron's proximity, combined with the overwhelming firepower of a standard Alliance Marine detachment, rendered the beleaguered planet bereft of its customary advantages in confronting the Alliance: distance and time.



FWEHA! WHAT HAVE YOU--?!

KKKKK BASIL! PLEASE...

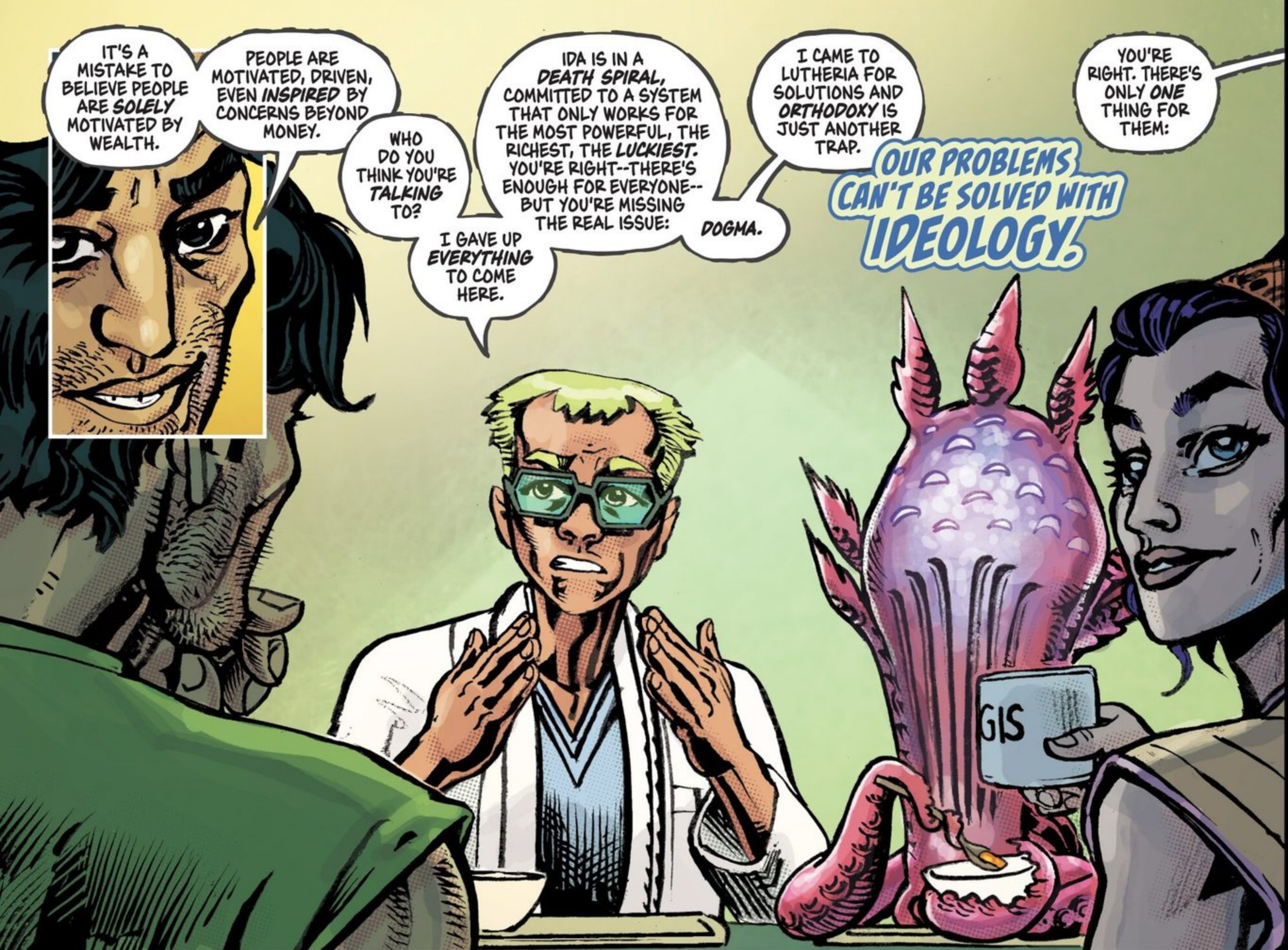


BLOCKADE SQUADRON, COME IN! JNH VESSEL TAKING HEAVY FIRE FROM LUTHERIAN FORCES!

REQUESTING IMMEDIATE SUPPORT!



I'LL EXPLAIN LATER. I PROMISE.



IT'S A MISTAKE TO BELIEVE PEOPLE ARE SOLELY MOTIVATED BY WEALTH.

PEOPLE ARE MOTIVATED, DRIVEN, EVEN INSPIRED BY CONCERNS BEYOND MONEY.

WHO DO YOU THINK YOU'RE TALKING TO?

I GAVE UP EVERYTHING TO COME HERE.

IDA IS IN A DEATH SPIRAL, COMMITTED TO A SYSTEM THAT ONLY WORKS FOR THE MOST POWERFUL, THE RICHEST, THE LUCKIEST. YOU'RE RIGHT--THERE'S ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE-- BUT YOU'RE MISSING THE REAL ISSUE:

DOGMA.

I CAME TO LUTHERIA FOR SOLUTIONS AND ORTHODOXY IS JUST ANOTHER TRAP.

YOU'RE RIGHT. THERE'S ONLY ONE THING FOR THEM:

OUR PROBLEMS CAN'T BE SOLVED WITH IDEOLOGY!



Following the death of Drest Sorun, Keen Toghot consolidated sufficient support to be chosen the Surroko's first All-Season War Chief; his first official act was to decline the Universal Power Corporation's offer and boldly reaffirm Surroko autonomy.



WORK.

ANI, OUR
SHIFTS ARE
STARTING.



I'VE READ
GRACCHON BEFORE
BUT HEARING YOU
EXPLAIN IT...

THANK
YOU.



YOU'RE NOT GIVING
YOURSELF ENOUGH
CREDIT, ANI.

NEXT TIME, I
WANT TO HEAR
WHAT YOU
THINK.



I'D LOVE
THAT! SEE
YOU SOON,
VICTOR!



KEEN...I
HAVE TO
GO.

I'VE KILLED
A WAR CHIEF
AND--

NO.

YOU'VE
SAVED ME...I
WILL ALLOW NO
HARM TO COME
TO YOU.



WE ARE
BROTHERS,
VICTOR...

...BONDED
BY BLOOD.

Keen Surroko's ascension was far from the only consequential outcome of the 519 moot, however. It also inaugurated the fabled partnership between the War Chief and Victor MacLiu, a union that proved critically effective in the coming revolution.

The Alliance's choice to deploy a Marine flagship--possessing firepower sufficient to destroy the Aegis, neutralizing Lutheria's space forces--was telling. The blockade squadron stood as a looming and implicit threat, sending a pair of unambiguous messages.

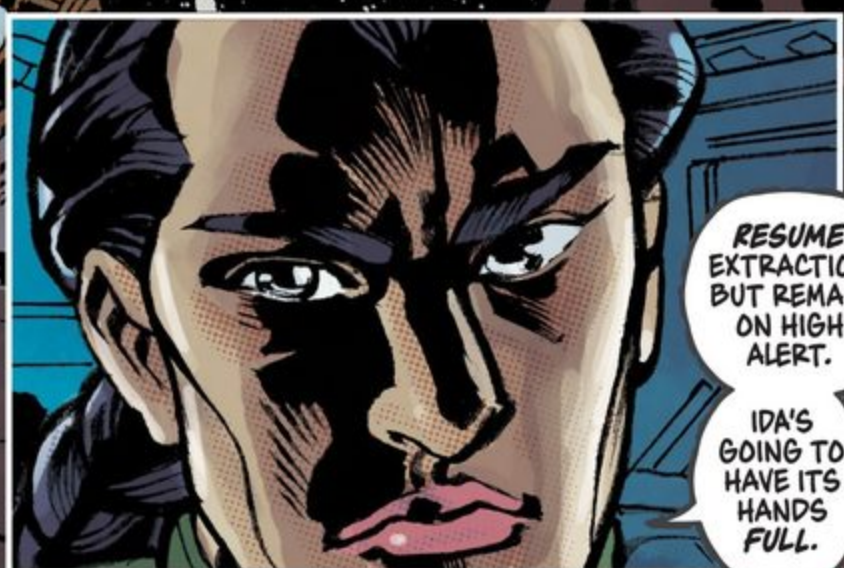
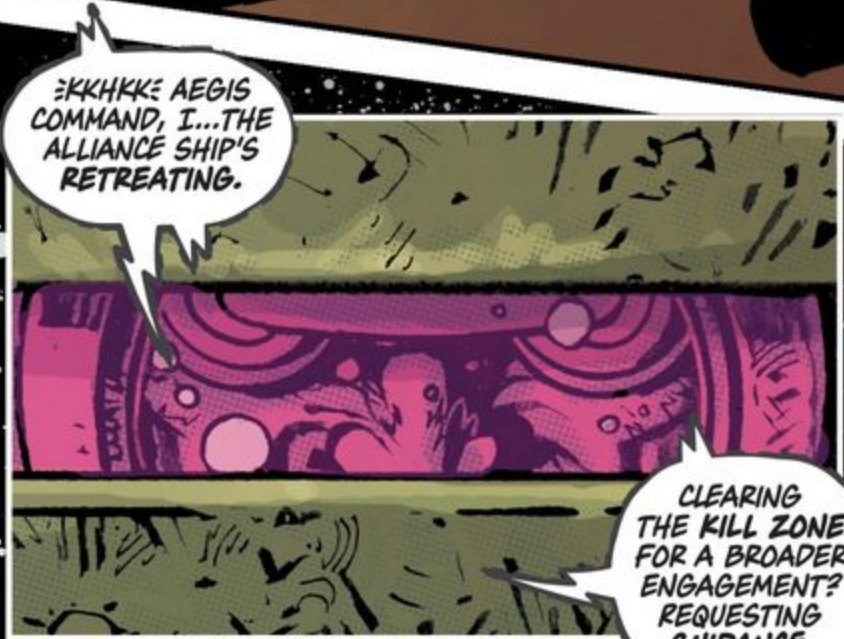
First, it demonstrated Lutheria's strategic value; despite the Orrusvo Empire's ongoing expansion and its amplifying ferocity, the Alliance nonetheless diverted significant forces away from the half-dozen border systems already consumed by conflict.

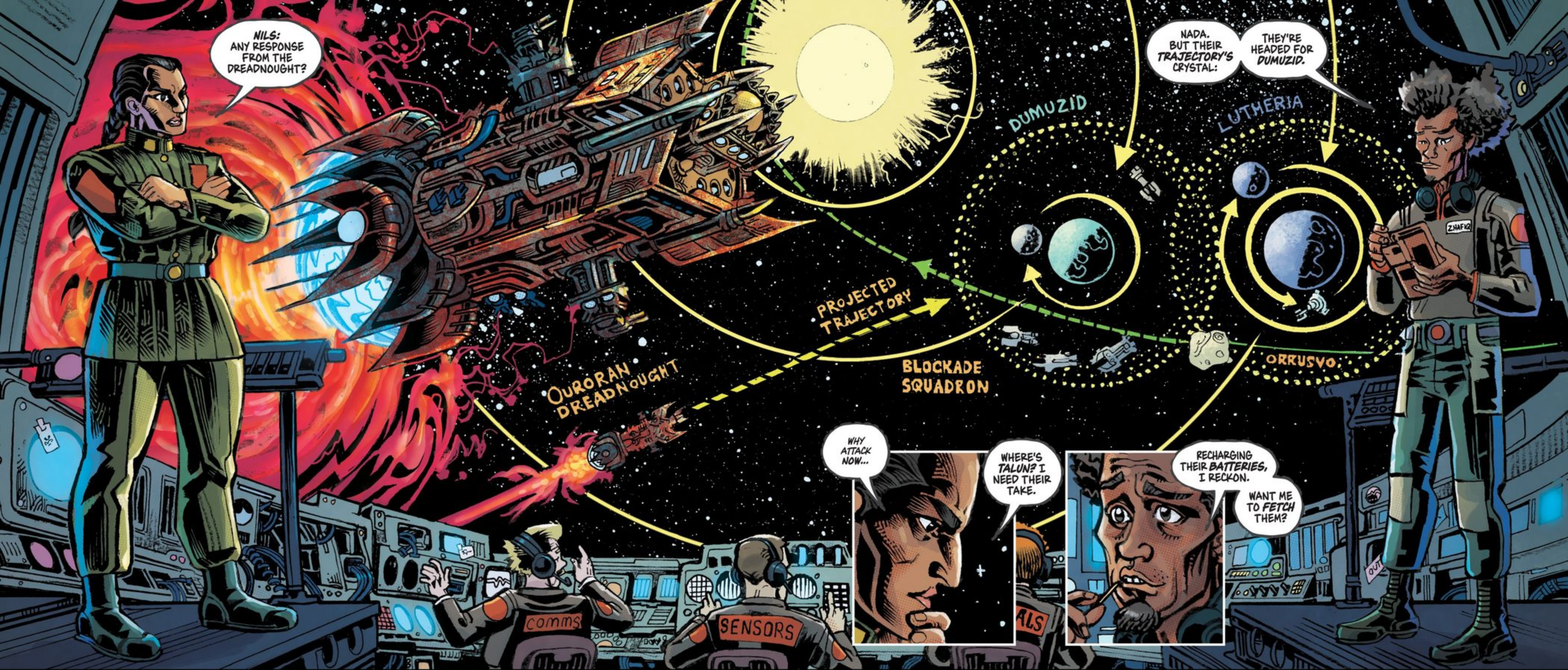
Second, the flagship's presence signaled a readiness to employ decisive, even overwhelming force. During the Revolution, the Alliance had been constrained by the necessity of safeguarding infrastructure critical to orchaleum extraction and exportation.

Away from the Lutherian surface, this proscription on maximum force no longer applied; calling down a flagship's unchecked destructive capabilities while providing pretext for a larger Alliance invasion was the risk so narrowly avoided during the Orrusvo Incident.

Fortunate were Lutheria broadly and the deployed members of the Freedom Guard specifically that the Orrusvo Incident did not escalate into broader, higher intensity hostilities. As a result, it remained a valiant moment rather than a catastrophic one.

However, the Orrusvo Incident remains a watershed in Lutherian history, as it precipitated a major strategic realignment that rapidly altered the balance of power in the Aten System, with cascading impacts across the universe entire.

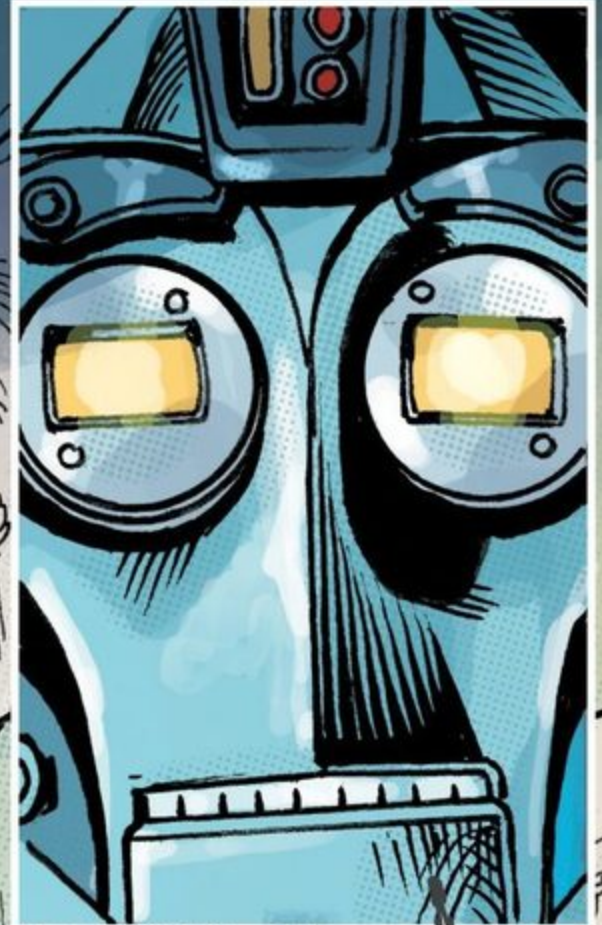






GLORIA...!

I WISH YOU HAD KNOCKED.



To be continued.

THE GREAT SUN'S JUSTICE: CULTURAL REPRODUCTION WITHIN OROURAN PROTECTORATES

BY DR. ALDOUS FOYROUSHI

Both despite and contributing to the enormity of the threat posed, the Interplanetary Development Alliance possessed exceedingly little intelligence regarding the Orouran Empire. This was owing, in the first instance, to the immediate cessation of all extra-imperial communications upon newly conquered planets. Crucially, imperial policy extended to the silencing of even that reliable handmaiden of Alliance expansion, the Teomekhean Church. The fates of individual Teomekhean clergy—as well as the numerous clandestine Alliance operatives subsequently deployed onto Orouran planets—remained shrouded in mystery.

Secondly, Orouran captives were exceedingly rare, as imperial marines were trained to avoid capture at all costs. Those few that Alliance forces managed to capture, however, provided no more intelligence than their fallen comrades, as their remarkable discipline extended to interrogation, withstanding even Far Star Security's enhanced techniques.

In light of the above, the bulk of Alliance—and, consequently, Lutheran—knowledge of the Orouran Empire was gleaned, intuited, discovered, and theorized about from the study of recaptured worlds. However, on account of the Empire's methodical expansion and overwhelming shows of force, the reclamation of lost Alliance territory was a rare occurrence. Rarer still were those worlds possessing civilizations not razed to cinders in the course of their liberation.



In addition to more conventional engagements with Orouran marines, Alliance liberation efforts also necessitated sustained, high-intensity counterinsurgency operations.

While the absorption of newly identified inhabited worlds was governed by the Rediscovery Protocols, mandating an approach both cautious and

subtle, Alliance reoccupation was anything but. From the moment Alliance ships entered a formerly controlled system, their war march slowed to a crawl, for across the universe, Orouran worlds shared a common trait: A vociferous refusal to leave the imperial embrace. Surrenders—negotiated or complete—were not forthcoming, necessitating that entire planets be won an inch at a time, amid kinetic and impassioned irregular warfare. Reclamation efforts were consistently confronted by the fact that imperial citizens, even new ones, viewed the Alliance not as liberators, but as conquerors.

Though there exist recorded instances of self-professed loyalists, Orouran worlds held no fifth columns to open the gates or cheer the Alliance's arrival. This is, perhaps, the clearest example of a fact that flatly contradicts and complicates both Alliance and Lutheran views of the Empire. By all indications—including detainee testimony—imperial citizens were proud to be such and grateful to live under the Great Sun's justice.

Despite the Orouran Empire's outwardly bellicose nature, peace remained the primary domestic concern upon newly conquered planets. Rather than immediately dismantling existing institutions, risking public disorder to bring new territories expediently into the fold, the Empire would, instead,

establish protectorates with the autonomy and structural administration of their new colonies largely maintained, though not without significant changes.

Arriving soon after large-scale hostilities had concluded, members of the Orouan Administrative Corps would first embark upon a leveling exercise, taking focused aim at the dramatic wealth inequality undergirding the Alliance economic and social system. This entailed, first and foremost, the expropriation of wealth and property from the wealthiest residents of a protectorate; unsurprisingly, the subjects of this redistribution were universally overrepresented among Alliance loyalists.

The wealth obtained through this process was redirected from private enrichment to the funding of initiatives designed not only to endear the Empire to the broadest swath of the populace but also to further the project of imperial cultural reproduction. The most notable and celebrated of these included free public housing, schooling, and healthcare; expansive public works projects; and situation-specific subsidies intended to offset newly imposed price controls on food and a steadily expanding range of other consumer goods.

Whereas the Orouan military relied upon overwhelming force to win planets, the Administrative Corps recognized that populations had to be won over separately. While Alliance expansion efforts—generally speaking—centered inducements to already privileged and/or ruling classes, the imperial strategy revolved around the provision of opportunity more broadly. This is best exemplified by the wide-ranging Imperial Examinations.

Universal examinations provided an opportunity for the Empire to identify, cultivate, and harness talent that could then be deployed in pivotal roles. For former Alliance citizens, however, the examinations were transformative, a way for even the most destitute to succeed based—not upon existing wealth or connections—but upon their merit and ambition. In an effort to promote self-rule in new protectorates, the Empire prioritized the placement of native-born citizens in on-planet roles within the Administrative Corps, but the opportunity to travel off-planet—which, under Alliance rule, necessitated crushing debt—also acted as a powerful incentive for those inspired to explore the breadth of Orouan space.

Collectively, these measures created a broad and durable base of support, especially in light of the rapid—and in many cases, near-immediate—eradication of poverty, hunger, and homelessness, plagues widespread on Alliance worlds. With regard to cultural reproduction, success beget success, with increasing popular buy-in, such that, rather than being forced into communal childrearing or the imperial cult at spearpoint, new citizens—already gifted with a dramatically improved quality of life—willingly and enthusiastically adopted Orouan practices. Thus, the gradual transition from protectorate to fully incorporated imperial holding was rendered gradual as well as peaceful, in keeping with the Great Sun’s justice.

By contrast, Alliance reclamation of these territories was intended to be definitive, all-encompassing, and expedient. This ambition was complicated, however, by the Orouan cultural influence that remained deeply rooted beneath the ruins of the Alliance’s frequently indiscriminate area bombardment campaigns. So pervasive and foundational were Orouan practices that the Alliance’s revanchist campaigns were met with ferocious resistance on the ground. In most cases, the Alliance was forced to make its peace with the continued Orouan influence upon reclaimed planets, such that the Empire’s influence—its approaches to child-rearing, opportunity, even religion—endured along the outskirts of Alliance territory.



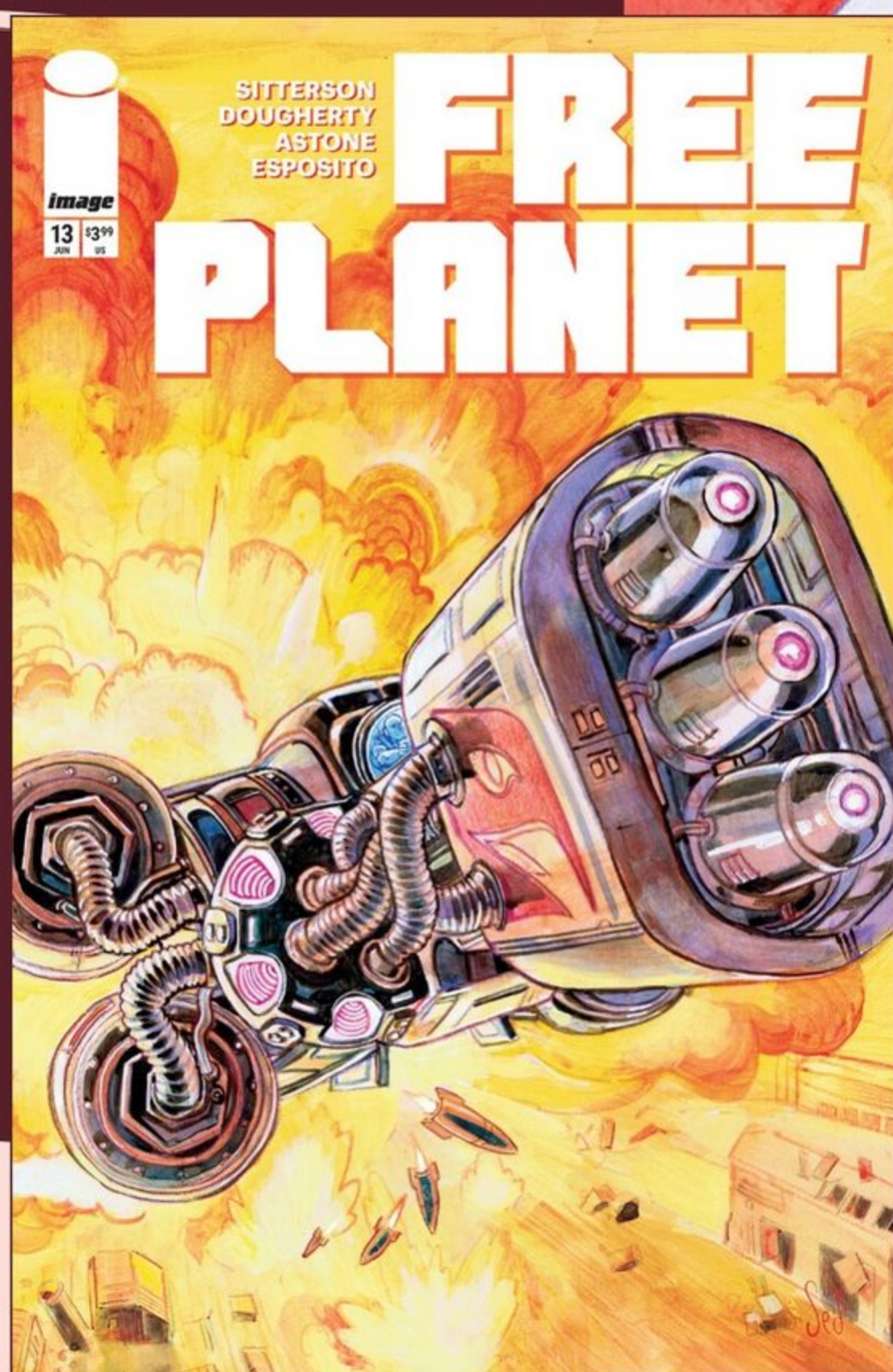
Facing Alliance proscriptions on the imperial cult, Orouan religious practices on recaptured Maezorin were frequently sublimated into folkloric sun worship.

SUBMIT QUESTIONS
regarding Lutheran history to
DrAldousFoyroushi@AtlantisStillSunk.com

NEXT ISSUE



Cover A



Cover B

"Our responsibility to one another is a sacred duty."

A geopolitical
space opera by
AUBREY SITTERSON
and **JED DOUGHERTY**

"Brings shades of the
cosmic imagination of Jack
Vance, Jack Kirby, and
Samuel Delany and Howard
Chaykin's great lost *Empire*."

—**Jonathan Lethem**
(*The Fortress of Solitude*,
Motherless Brooklyn)

FREE PLANET

**VOL
1**

"Rich, intricate
worldbuilding that
is equal parts *Dune*,
Claremont and
Saga while being
wholly original."

—**Robert Kirkman**
(*Invincible*,
The Walking Dead)

"A great comic book series,
a synergy of text and image
possessed with a density of
vision that shames most any
other attempt at legitimate
space opera in comics."

—**Howard Chaykin**
(*American Flagg*, *Time²*)



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APRIL 2026



HAMMERFIST

**AUGUST
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The CUTTING GARDEN™



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“Our problems can’t be
solved with ideology.”

—*Shohei Takahoun*

